

Additionally, I look forward to working with the new commissioner to restore the FDA's status as one of the strongest regulatory agencies in the world. I have no doubt that with the right leadership in place and with Congressional oversight, the FDA will again be the gold standard and our regulatory process the envy of the world.

Given Dr. Hamburg's expertise in emergency preparedness, pandemics and public health, I am pleased that the Senate acted quickly on this nomination. Again, I would like to congratulate Dr. Hamburg on her confirmation.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, yesterday the Senate confirmed Dr. Margaret "Peggy" Hamburg as Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, FDA.

Dr. Hamburg comes to the job at a time when our Nation's food safety system is in crisis. In the last couple of years we have seen nationwide outbreaks associated with spinach, tomatoes and peppers, and peanuts and peanut butter. With peanuts, we also saw the biggest food recall in our nation's history as hundreds of companies recalled thousands of products from crackers to ice cream to even pet food. Our food safety problems don't just start and stop at home: we have also seen chemically tainted pet food, milk products, and seafood from China.

It is no secret that our food safety system is in serious trouble. It is all over the headlines. It's also no secret that the FDA the agency responsible for protecting nearly 80 percent of our food hasn't kept up, with its outdated statutes, eroding budgets, and inadequate resources and authorities.

Congress hasn't passed a major food safety bill in decades, and we are seeing the results of that inaction. More than 76 million Americans become sick each year, 325,000 are hospitalized, and 5,000 die. Companies lose the confidence of their customers and shareholders, and they lose profits. Some experts estimate that the peanut growers will lose \$1 billion as a result of the latest outbreak. Kellogg, just one company among hundreds, lost \$70 million.

The time for comprehensive food safety reform is long past due. In March, Senator GREGG and I introduced the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act, a bipartisan bill that gives the FDA the new authorities and resources it needs to protect our food supply. This bill improves the FDA's capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to food safety problems, whether it's salmonella-tainted peanut butter from Georgia or melamine-spiked baby formula from China.

For the first time in a long time, we are also seeing leadership on food safety from the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue. The Food Safety Working Group, led by Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, is doing what hasn't been done in dec-

ades: taking a comprehensive, coordinated look at the outdated food safety laws on the books and making recommendations on reform.

Last week I had the opportunity to attend a first-ever listening session hosted by the White House focused on food safety reform. This was a chance for members of Congress, the administration, consumer groups, and industry to come together and talk about the challenges facing the safety of our food supply as well as the solutions.

Dr. Hamburg, with her public health expertise and impressive record of success as former health commissioner of New York City, is a welcome addition to the working group. I had a chance to meet with Dr. Hamburg before her confirmation. During our meeting, as well as in her confirmation hearing, she made clear her commitment to the long term goal of transforming food safety oversight at FDA to focus on the public health goal of prevention. I am confident that she is the right person to tackle this challenge and others facing the FDA, and to restore morale and public confidence in the agency. I look forward to working with her and the other members of President Obama's food safety working group to enact FDA food safety legislation this year.

(At the request of Mr. REID, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

GEORGE MITCHELL SCHOLARS

• Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, today, Taoiseach Brian Cowen met with the ninth class of George J. Mitchell Scholars. His decision to meet with this impressive group of students demonstrates the major contribution this program is making to strengthen the future of the United States-Ireland relationship.

The United States-Ireland Alliance was created in 1998 by my former foreign policy adviser, Trina Vargo. With limited resources and staff, the alliance has been at the forefront of recognizing, and then responding to, the fundamental changes in the United States-Ireland relationship.

The Mitchell Scholarship program is the keystone of the United States-Ireland Alliance. It has been led ably by Mary Lou Hartman, and has gone from strength to strength. In a few short years, the program has become as competitive and as sought after as other renowned scholarships such as the Rhodes, Marshall, and Fulbright Scholarships. This year, 300 people applied for the 12 annual Mitchell Scholarships. I have followed the causes of these former Mitchell Scholars and they are already making outstanding contributions and reflect the commitment to service exemplified by our former Senate colleague, George Mitchell.

One former Mitchell Scholar, Seena Perumal, lives in Cambridge, MA, where she serves as chief of staff for the Massachusetts Division of Health Care

Finance and Policy. Seena graduated with a bachelor's degree in religion and a master's in public health from Case Western Reserve University. She founded and was president of Project Sunshine, which serves hospitalized children, and founded and was president of Alternative Break, an organization that helps organize community service trips during spring breaks from college. She also worked with Cleveland Jobs With Justice, a group that ensures workers' rights. As a Mitchell Scholar, she obtained a master's degree in international human rights at the National University of Ireland in Galway. She then served as the director of new initiatives for the New York City Department of Homeless Services, the agency that oversees policies and programs for the city's approximately 37,000 homeless persons.

The U.S. Government has provided \$500,000 each year for the Mitchell Scholarship Program. I commend Irish businessman Derek Quinlan for his commitment to raise 20 million euros toward establishing a permanent endowment for this program. The Irish Government has agreed to match what is raised for this impressive program, and I am sure that United States-Ireland ties will continue to benefit significantly from these important scholarships in the years ahead.●

LETTER TO MEDTRONIC, INC.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that my letter dated May 18, 2009, to Medtronic, Inc. be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE,
Washington, DC, May 18, 2009.

BILL HAWKINS,
President and Chief Executive Officer,
Medtronic, Inc., Medtronic Parkway, Minneapolis, MN.

DEAR MR. HAWKINS: The United States Senate Committee on Finance (Committee) has jurisdiction over the Medicare and Medicaid programs. As a senior member of the United States Senate and as Ranking Member of the Committee, I have a special responsibility to protect the health of Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries and safeguard taxpayer dollars authorized by Congress for these programs. This includes the responsibility to conduct oversight of the health care industry, including makers of medical devices, which receive hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars every year for the care of Americans.

In carrying out this duty, I have been examining the substantial financial ties between the device industry and practicing physicians. I have also been examining the safety and cost of medical devices that are sold to the American public. As the largest medical device company in the United States, the practices of Medtronic, Inc. (Medtronic) have a profound impact on American healthcare.

Last October, I sent you a letter asking Medtronic to disclose payments to "all physicians with whom Medtronic has consulting agreements for Infuse." This request was spurred by an article in the Wall Street